

## 240 SIMILE ZOLA, NOVELIST AND REFORMER

as a check on his insulters and rehabilitate him in the eyes of the vulgar. At last Zola began to waver, and after consulting his wife, who favoured the proposal, he gave his assent to it. At the same time, mindful of M. Bardoux\* shilly-shallying, he insisted that he should have a formal promise from the minister immediately. It was given him; and very soon afterwards, the time having come to draw up the list of those who should be decorated on the occasion of the National Fete that year, 1888, M. Lockroy brought Zola's name before the Council of Ministers. Later, the decree having been signed and gazetted, he personally fixed the red ribbon to Zola's buttonhole in the drawing-room of the lady who had acted as intermediary.

She, it would appear, was not a little astonished some time afterwards when on receiving a visit from the novelist he told her that he had decided to offer himself as a candidate for the French Academy. And he explained the position thus : " I had the choice of two paths, one leading to the recognition of my readers only, the other leading to official recognition also. I never troubled about the latter, but you turned me into that path, and I am not the man to halt half way on any road. As there is an Academy I shall offer myself as a candidate directly a suitable

opportunity occurs. And," he added jocularly, "as there is a Senate also I may even offer myself as a candidate for that as well. Why not? Ste.-Beuve was a senator, and perhaps I myself shall be one."

Neither of those aspirations was realised; and, in later years, even, Zola's decoration of the Legion of Honour was almost taken from him. It had come to him, not as some have said as the result of "Le Rgve," which was not pub-